661 been appointed Deputy President of the Sovnarkom of the B. S. S. R.

563 I consider it necessary to remark on the absurdity of some statements to the effect that the N. K. V. D. discriminated in favor of the Jews in making its arrests. Such statements are untrue and tainted with anti-Semitism. If the interested party were concerned with establishing the truth, he could find out from documents that all People's Commissars of the B. S. S. R., regardless of how proletarian their extraction, were arrested. The Commissar of the Communal Economy of the B. S. S. R., Waserman, can serve as an example. During the Ezhovshchina he was arrested together with some others, and in prison went out of his mind. His wife was also arrested. The only one to escape arrest was the Deputy Commissar of the Food Industry, Evsei Paksin, and this was just an accident. The high ranking Jewish Party leaders did not escape either.

625 What went on in the rayons was unspeakably horrible. The
661 most primitive accomodations for thousands of people were hastily
[697] knocked together. In the city of Rogachevo prisoners were confined in the wintertime in a ruined old castle without stoves, doors or windows. The ruins were surrounded with barbed wire and by a guard. People died; an epidemic of typhus broke out, and the N. K. V. D. had to stop using the prison.

The inhabitants of the rayons adjacent to Poland were in excessively difficult straits as the N. K. V. D. border guard held sway there. Whole villages were emptied of their population. Everyone about whose reliability there was the slightest suspicion or who might have been suspected of being dissatisfied with the Soviet regime, was arrested. It can be stated without exaggeration that a good half of the male population suffered from the persecution. A 'troika's' had jurisdiction over the arrested, and the sentence was final and not subject to appeal. At night the condemed were carted away in trucks to be shot somewhere in the woods. /64/

As to the number of victims of the 1936-1937 terror we can judge by the following indices. Before the war Minsk had a population of about 250,000, and at the height of the Ezhovshchina from four to five hundred were arrested in a night. At twelve o'clock when the "normal work" of the N. K. V. D. usually began, fear seized the city's population. People could not sleep but waited nervously for the knock and the rustling. There was panic

(Dur., Ko political purges: 1936-1937- Nov. 2)

625 in the apartments at the sound of an automobile in the street. Every
661 family expected the dreaded visitors. Often in one family several persons were arrested. Fellow-workers in the various institutions, coming to work in the morning, looked around uneasily to determine the number of victims of the previous night. A person had to make superhuman efforts to maintain his outward calm and self-control at his work. He had to appear indifferent to the arrests of his close friends or people sharing his views. It was dangerous to show any interest in the prisoners or to ask about the fate of their families. The nerves of some who were still at liberty could not stand the strain. They did not lie down and go to sleep but got dressed and wandered aimlessly through the deserted streets of the city until morning. There was nothing to justify this behavior, but in the street one somehow felt more composed, and it was better than to wait for death in your own apartment. A person comforted himself with the fact that he would usually learn somewhat earlier if any fatal blow was being prepared for him. Many tried to be sent to distant, and if possible isolated, places. Anyone who could, tried to go to another oblast', another kray, far from any settled regions. There were cases of voluntary requests to be transferred to work in the Arctic Circle, Yakutiya, or the polar regions, of persons who signed contracts to work there -- in the hope of being saved from arrest. However these measures seldom were of any avail. Foresighted people would prepare a small parcel with laundry and some necessary articles in case they were to be arrested. The terror was heightened by rumors of the nightmarish conditions under which the prisoners were kept, tortures during the examinations, forced confessions. The prison cells were filled to overflowing; prisoners slept in shifts, all lying on one side so as to take up less room that way, and after a certain time, at a command, all turning over to lie on the other side.

697 Before being deposited in the cell, prisoners[1] were sub-
661 jected to the most minute search; all watches, glasses, aids, bandages which sick people might have, and shoe laces were taken away; buttons were cut off trousers, jackets, overcoats, and buckles were taken off shoes. Particular care was taken to make sure that the prisoners did not keep anything metallic. Being deprived of glasses and bandages was, for those who were sick, a cause not only of discomfort /65/ but of pain. The former provincial and district prisons were altered during the Ezhovshchina.

[1] [Political prisoners of the 1936-1937 purge - Ann'r]

697 Windows were reduced in size by the three quarters and filled with
661 bricks, wooden shields being set in some, to make it impossible to see the jail yard or the side of the street or to see the outside world in general. In the yards of the prison special cages were constructed for the prisoners' walks, surrounded by a high board fence without a roof, into which they let prisoners. Special small cells were made, completely without windows, and the number of rooms of confinement of all kinds was increased. The prison shops were made over into cells for holding prisoners. The prisons were transformed into places for keeping people who were under investigation. Those convicted were sent to distant concentration camps. Rooms were kept strictly isolated one from another, but nonetheless news was not only quickly disseminated throughout the prison but even penetrated beyond the walls.

When the terror slackened a very insignificant part of the
661 prisoners was set free. However, almost every one of them had been ruined in health: teeth had been knocked out, ribs broken, ear drums shattered, rectums injured from being forced to sit on the sharp point of a stool or chair leg. But the principal sickness was spiritual emptiness, and for many, bitter disillusionment, dejection, apathy. Those liberated who were not Party members returned to their former places of work, if they had not already been replaced by others. For this "forced" absence they were not reimbursed, even though Soviet labor law makes provisions for the individual's wages to be paid him by his employer if through no fault of his own he is unable to work. Many had been forced to sign an attestation that they would not divulge what they had seen and heard in the N. K. V. D., and this paralyzed any demand that their legal rights be protected which had
665 been mercilessly violated. Unenviable also was the lot of Party
661 members who were set at liberty.[1] They had to go through even more trouble to be reinstated in the Party. The very fact of arrest made the Party member an expellee. No doubt many of them would have been glad to remain outside the Party, but a person who had been expelled and made no effort at reinstatement was automatically put in an incomparably worse situation than that of any non-Party person. Leaders adopted a rather guarded attitude toward those who had been liberated from arrest. They were a source of fear and danger in the event of one of the possible twists of the Communist Party's unforeseeable and changeable policy.

[1] [After having been arrested during the 1936-1937 political purge - Analyst]